

Layers of Loss: Narratives, Materiality, and Memory in the Bohemian Forest

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Abstract: The Bohemian Forest (Šumava/Böhmerwald) has long been represented through recurring narratives of loss and disappearance. Drawing on ethnographic fieldwork and historical sources, this presentation explores how these narratives materialise in the landscapes of Bučina (Buchwald) and Knížecí Pláně (Fürstenhut), two abandoned settlements. It examines how more-than-human agency – including that of ruins, memorials, and vegetation – interacts with commemorative practices and tourism in shaping remembering and forgetting. Spanning the nineteenth century to the present, the histories examined encompass environmental transformations associated with forestry and nature conservation, the forced displacement of German-speaking inhabitants after the Second World War, and subsequent village demolitions along the Iron Curtain. These histories form overlapping layers that accumulate, interact, and reinforce or complicate one another. Meanings of loss and gain are therefore negotiated through the interplay of memory, materiality, and visions of nature.

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